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SUBJECT: Muslim Community and German City Sign Innovative
Integration Agreement

¶1. SUMMARY. The German city of Wiesbaden and nine Muslim community organizations signed a long-discussed, groundbreaking integration agreement September 27. The agreement, wherein the city and the Muslim community pledge to cooperate in a number of areas, is the first of its kind at any level in Germany and may set a precedent for other cities. While all the political parties and most Muslim organizations support the agreement, it has been criticized for being discriminatory by singling out the Muslim community for special treatment. END SUMMARY.

More Tolerance, More Education, More Mosques

¶2. The first-ever integration agreement in Germany was signed by representatives of the city of Wiesbaden, including Lord Mayor Helmut Mueller (CDU), and nine of the twelve large mosque-building associations in the city. Wiesbaden, a city of 287,000 and the capital of the federal state of Hesse, has around 15,000 Muslim residents, including 11,500 of Turkish heritage. In signing the eleven-point seven-page document, both sides recognized and affirmed their commitment to the values of Germany's Basic Law and the principles of tolerance, respect and transparency in action. The agreement comes one year after the "German Islam Conference" where federal government officials discussed integration issues with representatives of the Muslim population. The German government was criticized at the time for discussing integration with representatives of groups that had no elected mandate in the Muslim community.

¶3. In signing the agreement, the Muslim organizations pledged to make their activities and materials accessible to the public and to offer them in German. They affirmed the principle of gender equality and agreed to encourage Muslims in the community to allow girls to take part in athletic activities and school trips. The organizations recognized knowledge of German as essential to successful integration. Peter Grella, Wiesbaden Integration Commissioner and the lead drafter of the agreement, told the Ambassador August 1 that younger Muslims were particularly interested in such an agreement because it would provide them with greater educational opportunities and a platform to succeed.

¶4. The city agreed to support the building of new mosques and a cemetery and recognized Muslims as equal members of society. Wiesbaden schools and kindergartens will no longer serve pork. The city will also support Muslim religious instruction in schools in Hesse, something which does not yet exist. The agreement promises to increase opportunities for language training for immigrants, especially women and children.

¶5. The effort to conclude the agreement has been underway for almost five years, with the idea gaining more strength in 2004 when a disagreement over a mosque-building project brought attention to the issue. The Tauhid community in Wiesbaden had proposed building a mosque with minarets, prompting outcry from a citizen's initiative. The Head of the Wiesbaden Integration Office, Jeanine Rudolph, told Polspec that the Muslim communities realized as a

result of this dispute that they did not know how to deal with the public and that their actions were often seen as non-transparent. The agreement was meant to create greater transparency and trust between the Muslim communities and rest of the city. The negotiation process has been protracted, reflecting the sensitivities on both sides.

The Integration Agreement: For and Against

¶6. The integration agreement was supported by Lord Mayor Mueller and the city council, which has a CDU-Green-FPD ruling coalition. The opposition SPD, which is often seen as the traditional ally of the Muslim community, also expressed its support for the agreement saying: "We welcome the successful signing of the integration agreement and see it as an important step for living together in Wiesbaden."

¶7. Not all Muslim communities in Wiesbaden agreed to sign. The Ditib Mosque-Building Association (the largest Muslim community group in the city) refused, saying its only contract with the German state is the Basic Law and it does not need any more agreements. Ditib also said the city government dictated the agreement, expecting the community to accept and obey. The Initiative of Secular and Lay Citizens from Muslim Countries in Hesse (ISL) criticized the agreement for singling out and stigmatizing Muslims and for promoting nine religious organizations -- who, in ISL's view, do not speak for the diverse Muslim community -- as official talking partners. In a statement, representatives of ISL argued: "The signal to the public, most of which has nothing to do with Islam, is that the Muslim population can not live in accordance with the constitution without a special agreement."

¶8. One notable signatory is the controversial Turkish-Muslim association Milis Goerues, which is under surveillance by the state

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Office for the Protection of the Constitution (OPC). The ISL statement criticized the inclusion of Milis Goerues in the process saying that treating this allegedly dangerous group like any other only gave it undue recognition. Media sources argued that the agreement tacitly recognized the legality of Milis Goerues' activities. State Legal Expert Markus Poecker said that Milis Goerues would remain under surveillance until the state had established that the organization accepted the Basic Law in action as well as in words.

¶9. COMMENT. The integration agreement undoubtedly provides benefits for the mosque-building associations and the greater Muslim community in Wiesbaden by ensuring support for their activities. It will also improve the image of the Muslim community in the city by demonstrating its commitment to working with the greater community and accepting broadly held values. However, it is clear that many elements within the community see the agreement, which would be inconceivable in many other Western countries, as a Faustian bargain and a setback in reaching their goal of equal treatment under the law. Other state and federal politicians may look at the example of Wiesbaden as they attempt to develop relationships with representatives of the Muslim community. END COMMENT.

¶10. This cable was coordinated with Embassy Berlin.
POWELL